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*"O Mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him He created his wife (Eve), and from them He created many men and women. Fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah ever watches over you."*

AN NISA 1

# INTRODUCTION

The innovations incorporated in wedding ceremonies and the violation of the Shari'ah are alarming to any Allah fearing person, not to speak of the expense incurred at a time when nearly half the Ummah is barely making ends meet.

This booklet aims at explaining the origins of wedding rituals in this day and age, with the hope that individuals can assess how deeply they have immersed themselves in imitating the non-Muslims. The social pressures of weddings are analysed and examples of an Islamic wedding from the first generation are cited. Numerous Ayah from the Holy Qur'an and ahadith are also quoted for the unbiased individual to take heed and make an objective view.

We pray to Almighty Allah that this booklet becomes a source of inspiration to conduct weddings in accordance with the Shari'ah-Ameen.

# THE ORIGINS OF WEDDING RITES

It is the greatest mercy of Allah ﷻ, the Creator of all, that He has blessed us with Islãm as a way of life.

Islãm does not simply demand of us to pray or to be obedient to Allah ﷻ alone, but it inculcates in us that we conduct our day to day life as prescribed by the Glorious Qur'an and the way shown by the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad ﷺ.

Our Islamic culture is rich, colourful and also virtuous. We need to draw upon it for the enrichment of our lives. Those fortunate ones amongst us who conduct their lives according to Islamic teachings reap the benefits of success in this life and in the eternal life to come. Whether a person is involved in prayer, business, social activity, sport or resting, if these are performed in accordance with Islamic teachings then he/she will gain the reward for it from the Bountiful Allah ﷻ for his or her actions. It is our great weakness and failure not to accumulate this great wealth of thawab which Allah ﷻ the All Merciful has promised to shower upon us. Unfortunately many of our intentions and actions have become diametrically opposed to Islamic teachings.

One such great misery upon our community is to be witnessed at weddings. This great event where the union of two individuals shapes their whole future life together has become an occasion of obscene violation of the Shari'ah. It is an occasion in which Allah's ﷻ mercies and blessings should be sought with great fervour. However, we openly and unashamedly violate every command of Allah ﷻ as a group. Instead of seeking the Mercies and Blessings of Allah ﷻ we invite His wrath.

Not only are the two respective families of the bride and the groom satisfied in breaking every rule of the Shari'ah, but they Amass

hundreds if not thousands of people to partake in wrong actions and multiply the sins into millions.

Almost every aspect of the marriage ceremony today in our community is alien to Islãm, based on pagan tradition handed down to us from our forefathers or copied from other communities or from TV and advertisements. Only the nikah ceremony has remained intact and sadly this event is attended by the least number of guests.

From engagement to honeymoon and everything in between stag/hen nights, Mendhi party, Mo'harue, the hiring of a wedding car, the arrival party for the bride, the blessing of the groom, the wedding and engagement rings, the wedding dress, the tiara (crown), the wedding cake, the exhibiting of the bride and the groom to the public, the photographic sessions, the return of the bride to her parents after a fortnight and many more are all customs derived from non-Islamic cultures. As for the Muslims from the Indian sub-continent they have amassed both Christian and Hindu traditions in their weddings.

One of the dangers has been that, over time, rituals taken up for mere fun have become integrated into our wedding occasions as important, compulsory elements and even raised to the status of being fardh, without which a wedding ceremony is thought to be incomplete. As the importance of these alien events are raised, they are repeated in subsequent weddings and the rituals become a custom. It is these customs, which has no basis in Shari'ah, thus become classified as innovations.

# INNOVATIONS

It is well to clarify here the matter of innovation (bid'ah) which many people talk about without clear understanding. For that we need to be clear about the key elements of the wedding in the Shari'ah. Marriage is not a ritual but an act of ibadah (worship). It is a contract between

the groom and the bride, with the bride's guardian (usually her father) acting on her behalf or at least being present to show that he consents to the wedding. There must be two male Muslim witnesses, or one male and two females, of good character and standing. There must be a previously agreed Mahr', given to the bride and not to her parents, which reflects the groom's financial capacity and the bride's social standing [1] .There should be a public celebration open to all, usually after marital relations between husband and wife, known as Walimah.

*It is reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah ؓ, that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The worst food is the food of the wedding feast (Walimah) to which the rich are invited and the poor are left out. If anyone rejects an invitation, he has rebelled against Allah and His Messenger"*

*Bukhari & Muslim*

It is against the Sunnah to refuse an invitation to a Walimah, which is conducted according to the Shari'ah, without a valid excuse.

Innovations come under several headings in the Shari'ah: obligatory, recommended, permitted, frowned upon and haram. However, Muslims are not allowed to introduce new matters; that is only permitted to the leader of the Muslims, the Khalifah or an Amir to whom the Muslims have pledged allegiance in consultation with the men of knowledge. They alone can judge if a matter is permitted or not.

A simple definition of innovation is where one adds something new to the Deen as a necessary part of it. It may be noted that the invention and introduction of something new other than Deen is not innovation [2].

The most serious innovations in a wedding are those which enter into any of the above key elements. Thus, if the bride's guardian is not present or does not agree [3], if the dowry is miserably little and the groom can easily afford better; or it is so extravagant that the groom is seriously burdened by it or falls into debt; or if the parents take the

dowry as their right, these are not acceptable. Similarly, if there are no Muslim witnesses of sound character, or the wedding is performed in a registry office or a church it would be haram.

The wedding celebrations of the first community in Madinah were simple. There is no harm in a wealthy person feeding his guests well, but extravagance lavished on a few chosen guests  whether it seriously indebts the hosts or not is absolutely forbidden.

## THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

It is also well to understand that in the Shari'ah of Islãm, the People of the Book, i.e. the people who had Prophets and revealed teachings before Islãm and of those who now refuse to follow Islãm, are disbelievers. Thus the Jews and the Christians are kuffar and most certainly the idolatrous Hindus too are kuffar. When Islãm is strong, the People of the Book may make a contract to live under the protection of Islamic governance. However, they are not permitted in such a contract to imitate the Muslims and must maintain their distinct identity. It is even more abhorrent for the Muslims to imitate the People of the Book and it is preferable for the Muslims to go out of their way to avoid imitating them. This is not to say that the customs of a land are absolutely prohibited, for they may have no religious significance and merely be local traditions, such as some types of dress and foods. However, where a custom is clearly a religious tradition of disbelievers the Muslims must avoid imitating it.

Those of us unfortunate enough to be involved in activities contrary to the teachings of Islãm need to take heed and pray to Allah ﷾ to make following the right path easy for us. For, on the Day of Resurrection when the burning heat will be upon us and the horrors of the fire visible, whose heat and powers will send a fiery thirst down one's throat. A pool will be seen, whose water will be whiter than milk, cool and sweeter than honey. The Prophet of Allah ﷾ will be there, giving

his Ummah water to drink. When the innovators, thirsty and tired, come to the pool, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ will want to quench their burning thirst, but a group of angels will stand between the people and the Apostle, stopping them from advancing any further. When the Merciful Prophet ﷺ will tell the angels that these are his people from his Ummah, the angels will say in reply that these people invented new things in religion, unknown to him, after his departure. He will, in spite of the horrific time and thirst, ask the angels to keep them away from him. It is because they made things compulsory that have no basis in Shari'ah.

*The Messenger ﷺ is reported to have said, "First of all I shall arrive at the pool of Kauthar and put the matter right. Whoever will come to me will have his thirst quenched and from that day on he will never feel thirsty. Thereafter, some groups of people will appear who will recognise me and I shall recognise them, but a screen will be drawn between them and myself. I shall say that they belong to me but I shall be informed that these people invented new things after I had gone. Thereupon, I shall say: 'Keep them off! Keep them off, those who changed my religion after me'."* Bukhari

Alien traditions have been adopted deeply in the social fibre and to ask anyone to refrain from exchanging rings, wearing a wedding suit or white dress, having a honeymoon or a wedding cake would be unthinkable and not negotiable. To consider a wedding without such rites has become unimaginable.

Readers should to try and evaluate how many items mentioned below have become important and even compulsory parts of a wedding in our community and to assess the consequences of such rites.

# RINGS

## THE ENGAGEMENT RING

The formal engagement party and especially the exchange of rings

began in the Roman era. Under Roman law the bridegroom furnished security for the completion of the bargain. The ring and solemn embrace gave the act mystic significance. Later the tradition was carried on by the Christians; *De Sponsalibus et Donationibus ante Nuptias* required an engagement contract sworn before witnesses and solemnised by a ring. If either party died during the engagement the survivor and heirs divided the estate between them. It was legally possible to sue the partner who decided to break the engagement and there are hundreds of cases in the history of English law. Of course returning the ring is still a vital step in breaking an engagement. The significance of an engagement and the ring is a tradition based on the Christian ethos, western culture and superstition. It is, of course, bad luck to lose or damage an engagement ring, lest the contract it represent should suffer and if another girl tries on the ring the owner's future happiness will be jeopardised.

In Islãm there is no basis for the concept of an engagement and the Sunnah is to marry the couple without unnecessary delay, once they have agreed to marry. Thus the engagement contract or party and the engagement ring are innovations introduced into Islãm.

## THE WEDDING RING

The manual of *Sarum Use*, which defines forms of service acceptable in the diocese of Salisbury (Church of England), suggests a reason for choosing the fourth finger of the left hand as the wedding ring finger:
The English 'Christian' custom dictates that, after the Priest has blessed the ring, the bridegroom should place it, first, on the bride's thumb with the words:

"In the name of the father" then on the index finger "and of the son" then on the middle finger "and of the holy ghost" and finally on the fourth finger "Amen".

Pope Nicholas I (c 866 CE) states that the whole ceremony of Christian matrimony falls into two clearly defined parts: (1) The preliminary

betrothal, i.e. the expression of consent by the parties and (2) the delivery of the pledges, represented by the giving of the ring.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Cotenian Edition (pps 703-704) states, "The form for the celebration of Sacrament of Matrimony consists of:

(1) A declaration of consent formally ratified by the priest in the words 'I unite you in wedlock in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

(2) A form for the blessing of the ring which the bridegroom receives back from the hand of the priest to place upon the ring finger of the bride's left hand."

The wedding ring has customarily symbolised an everlasting promise. Today dates and initial are engraved within it. The tradition for this dates back a long time. The ancient Greeks favoured such words as ZEE "Mayest thou live". Jewish 'Mizpah' rings were often decorated with a raised device in the shape of a house containing perfume or a holy relic: "The Lord watch between me and thee…" (Genesis 31: 49). Engraving the ring was most popular with the Crusaders who favoured rings holding a relic of the 'true cross'.

The 'double ring ceremony' in which the couple exchange identical rings, symbolising the exchange of vows, is increasingly popular. This European practice apparently spread to America with returning servicemen after the Second World War. It is said that over 90 per cent seem to favour this tradition, to the delight of jewellers. The new form of marriage service introduced by the Church of Wales in 1975 provides for the double ring ritual and rings are exchanged 'in token of love and faithfulness'. The common practice within European culture is to swear and solemnise the wedding with the ring, thus: "With this ring I thee wed…"

The importance of the rings in a Christian wedding cannot be over-

emphasised. A manual written in 1691 on the rituals to be followed directed that two rings be used, but if these are not forthcoming (either because the couple cannot afford them or otherwise) then the priest is to bless two wreathes (serta) and present them to the married couple.

The 'great authority' Charlemagne even declared that without the blessing of the marriage by a priest through rings marriages should not be held valid [4].

The historian and philosopher, Ivan Illich, discovered that the Church had invented the 'sacrament' of marriage in the 11th century CE. Prior to that, what was then called 'common law' marriage had been something more akin to an Islamic marriage  a contract between the couple in the presence of the bride's father and before witnesses followed by the community's celebration of the event. We add to that, that if the Church took over marriage in the Middle Ages, the State took it over in the modern age when it required the registering of marriages (which now alone is sufficient for a legal marriage) The 'common law' marriage today being a term for an unconventional and illicit relationship un-sanctioned by Church or State.

The wedding ring comes with its own superstitions. A wedding ring must never be bought on a Friday, due to the ill reputation of this day in Christianity. In rural America it is ill advised to buy a ring through a mail order catalogue lest it should have absorbed bad luck from others who have tried it on and then returned it. The ring must never be put on before the ceremony, or at any time by anyone but the owner. It is of course unlucky to drop the ring during the ceremony [5].

Some women decline to wear a wedding ring because it is thought to have developed from the shackle once put on brides to subdue her after her capture. Indeed history shows that during Pliny's time Roman brides wore iron rings said to have been originally links in a chain denoting her bondage to her husband [6].

denoting her bondage to her husband [6].

## THE WEDDING DRESS

Dressing for the wedding is a rite of passage, brides throughout history and across cultures wear new and clean clothes. However fashion and the aristocracy introduced the white wedding dress. The first all-white wedding dress of modern times appears to have been worn by Ann of Brittany for her marriage to Louis XII. The words 'white wedding' have become neatly expressive of all the old traditions of white satin, bridesmaids, flowers, bells and wedding cakes. "Are you having a white wedding?" one girl will ask another soon after the announcement of an engagement. White epitomises purity and also is said to deter the evil eye. At Orthodox Jewish weddings the groom as well as the bride wear white. Lively beliefs surround the wedding dress: the French say that a bride lives the same number of years as there are buttons on her wedding dress; a penny sewn into the seam brings luck wherever it later goes, others seem to preserve the wedding dress and parts like the lace and veil rather than passing it on. The wedding veil is often later put in the coffin when the person dies.

## CROWNING THE 'TIARA'

The wearing of the crown on the head is derived from early Christian tradition. Crowning typifies purity and at early Christian weddings the couple were crowned by the Priest with garlands of myrtle (evergreen shrubs) after he had blessed the marriage ceremony. In the Eastern Christian Orthodox wedding ceremony, the bride and the groom are still given golden crowns to wear. The importance of wearing a crown is held in such a high esteem within the church that in some regions the crowns were bought by the parish and lent to all so that brides rich and poor might appear 'at their best' on their wedding day. Even today the Greek and Russian Christian marriages need two distinct ceremonies. In the first service, rings are exchanged between the

bride and the groom. The second ceremony is called crowning. The service is one of considerable length in which both parties again solemnly express their consent to the union and towards the end the 'blessed' crown is placed on the head of the bride by the priest. The groom and bride afterwards partake of a cup of wine which has previously been blessed and exchange a kiss [7].

## THE WEDDING CAKE

The cake has become an important ingredient of many weddings, therefore making possible a whole series of events. Without it, an essential wedding photograph, the cutting and the toast and the distribution of the cake afterwards would all fall away. Whatever other rites and formalities may be omitted in the celebration of a marriage, the cutting of the cake is the least likely.

The wedding cake itself is a 'monumental cake', a symbol rather than a delicacy, a tradition handed down from one generation to the next, whose origins are traced within the Christian Church.

As far as weddings are concerned, one of the roots of their association with cakes was religious, though this was rather thoroughly hidden from succeeding generations by the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Previously, bread would often be blessed at the end of Sunday Mass and distributed. Service books, such as the Scottish Rathen Manual in the Sarum tradition dating from the fifteenth century, included forms for such blessings. Its editor comments:

"*To the present day in many parts of Christendom, those who consider themselves unfit to communicate eagerly partake of a special kind of cake or bun that is handed round.*" *McGregor, 1905*

In the Nuptial Mass this usual practice was then developed somewhat further:

"*After mass there shall be blessed some bread and wine or any pleasant drink in a vessel and they shall taste it in the name of the Lord: 'Bless O lord this bread and this drink as Thou didst bless the five loaves in the desert and the six water pots in Cana of Galilee, that all who taste thereof may be healthy, sober and undefiled*." *McGregor 1905*

A small reminder is needed that the expression 'the breaking of the bread' is derived from Christian culture, with symbolic links to a part of the central Christian ritual, the mass [8] in which it is actually considered by the Catholics and I seek refuge with Allah ﷻ from the evil of their shirk to become the body of Christ. Although the Church of England sought a slightly devious theological trick to get out of such an obviously ridiculous concept.

Later in the century Aubery (1881) refers to bridal-cake breaking also linking the term 'bride cake' to it and connecting it with Christian culture.
Such antiquated concerns were very real in England. A marriage procedure thought to involve cake breaking was then occasionally used as equivalent to marriage or wedding.

However, the main origin is the Christian Church. Especially Catholic ritual and in particular the meaning of the bread and wine in the mass, which are taught as a qualification for participation and, as far as this central rite is concerned, constantly reiterated in the ritual text. There may be other meanings and origins of the cake but Christianity has to be regarded as the root origin [9].

## CAKE CUTTING

Researchers who have dealt with rites suggest the following reasons as to why cake cutting has become an important act and an essential rite in weddings:

1. The idea that it is the first joint action on the part of the newly weds.

2. Sharing richness with friends and family. The wedding cake is traditionally shared amongst guests so that blessing and happiness can be shared [10].

3. Cutting the cake, wrote one correspondent, was the couple 'taking the plunge' into their new life. It suggested that the cutting severed the couples links with the past and prepared them for their future together.

4. A psychologist who researched the social behaviour and significance of cake cutting suggested that the cutting of the cake meant the bride losing her virginity: the way the groom puts his hand on the bride's, so it's not just her, it's him too.

It is the cutting however which is given the most striking new significance if the cake is identified with the bride. Plunging the knife into the centre of the cake breaks through the 'virginal white' outer shell. It is something the couple do together.

This symbolic meaning has been available since joint cake cutting evolved in the first half of the twentieth century. The lesson to be drawn is not therefore that symbolic interpretation can in any way readily undermine practice. Few would take symbolic meaning in itself that seriously. But linked into wider and more practical concerns it may occasionally do so [11], and for Muslims, it should give thought for concern.

## THE FLOWERS

At Western weddings the groom, the best man and the ushers usually wear white carnations. An American bridegroom in a white wedding jacket on the other hand wears a red flower. By an old tradition the groom is supposed to choose a flower which also appears in his bride's bouquet. The use of flowers at weddings has been noted from Stuart England.

An indispensable American wedding custom, deriving from the old English tradition 'flinging the stocking', is 'throwing the bouquet'. Just before the bride leaves to change for her honeymoon (Jewish brides throw their bouquets after changing into going-away clothes) she mounts a staircase and tosses her bouquet among the bridesmaids standing below; the girl who catches it will supposedly be the next bride 12.

Western tradition would lead us to believe flowers express fertility, love and affection. It is important to note that the Shari'ah is not against flowers or their decorative use. The question raised here is the use of flowers on a special occasion in a ritualistic manner made obligatory by Western Christian culture.

## RITUALS MORE SPECIFIC TO MUSLIMS FROM INDIA

Muslims from the Indian sub-continent residing in England, have not only adopted the English tradition and the fashionable norms of the day but they have also imported and incorporated Hindu rites which their forefathers practised in India. Some of these rites have become so deeply ingrained and fundamental that without them a wedding would be considered incomplete.

A study of the rites of a Hindu marriage reveals that they are based on Vedic models laid down in Sanskrit in the Hindu laws. The marriage ritual has evolved into a complex, elaborate and expensive ceremony propagated by priests. The complete practice is justified and legitimised by the Hindu theory of marriage as a sacrament (Samskara) which means that the performance of elaborate rituals are claimed to have beneficial effects on the couple. The consideration of whom to invite, what presents to give and what to expect from others in future dealings seem prominent in a Hindu wedding 13.

## THE MARRIAGE PARTY 'JANN'

The Vivaha, a book for Hindus on marriage customs, spells out that on the wedding day the groom with his friends and relatives goes to the

house of the bride on a conveyance (mode of transport) suited to his status (Gujarati's call it the Jann party). In the past, elephants were recommended for Princes and the rich, nowadays they are replaced by Rolls Royce and Mercedes. (Also stated in Viramitro daya Samskara Prakasa) On arrival, the groom stands outside the gate of the house facing east and is welcomed by a company of women, who are the bride's friends and relatives. (The marriage procession is mentioned as early as in the Rigveda p. 85, the Atharvaveda, the Sankhyayana and the Asvalayana Grhyasutras). The bride's friends then cajole and offer drink and food to the bridegroom [14].

In order to express this rite, Muslims in Britain today go to the expense of hiring costly cars for their 'Jann Party'. Others, to impress with their wealth and status actually purchase new cars for the day. It is not uncommon for the bride and the groom to hire a horse and carriage and it is also known that people have gone as far as hiring a helicopter for the occasion. This can be nothing but exhibitionism and gross extravagance. The Qur'an carries a terrible warning for such behaviour.

The custom of providing guests with transportation goes too far. Those who are privileged to have been invited, should at least make their own way.

## OFFERING GIFTS 'MO'HARUE'

One elaborate ritual in Hindu marriage is the exchange of gifts. For this rite a special occasion called Mo'harue is set aside. Depending on the geographical area of India, special close relatives begin the process of giving presents followed by other invited guests. In Gujarat, a state in India, the paternal uncles of the bride initiate the process. However, there is a lack of sincerity and honesty from both the parties. This form of exhibitionism is against the teachings of Islam. Islam teaches us to offer gifts to friends, neighbours and relatives for mutual benefit and appreciation and strengthening ties. The quality or expense of the gift is not considered but the love and value of

expense of the gift is not considered but the love and value of friendship it denotes should be assessed. Islam promotes the giving of presents but one should be cautious about the intention in giving the present.

*A'ishah ﵂ said, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have said, "Give presents to one another, for a present removes hatred."*

*Tirmidhi & Abu Dawud*

However, in weddings today a great show is made by the giver, up to the point that the presents are wrapped in transparent paper and exhibited to all before giving. The recipient afterwards makes a note in his diary of what he received and from whom, so that on future occasion he knows what to give. Rather than an honest and wholehearted gift the occasion is based on exchange of presents subject to what one received in the past or what one expects in the future. The benefit (barakah) and love one may hope to reap from giving a present is lost, for, if anything, the receiver considers it a burden as he will have to reciprocate with a similar gift in the future and the giver will silently suffer until he receives a gift similar to the one he gave. As the etiquette of Islamic teachings are abandoned with it the heart's tranquillity is lost.

In some communities there prevails a culture where the presents of the bride are kept by the parents. This is justified by them on the grounds that the bride has only received them because the parents had given them in the past. This is a forbidden innovation. These people treat their daughter's as if they are their financial assets.

Altogether, the event becomes a highly exhibitionist one wherein family members try to out-perform one another in expectation of applause from the other guests.

## BLESSING THE BRIDE

The Hindu tradition orders that the assembled guests and relatives

bless the bride/couple: the women stroke their fingers over the heads and faces of the couple, reciting some verses over them and then cracking their fingers against their own heads. The Paraskara Grhyasytra guides that after having blessed the couple the guest must go back to their seats or return home.

A major part of a Hindu wedding is symbolic. One class of ceremonies symbolises the union. Other ceremonies have their origins in a desire to promote fertility or to assure an abundance of food for the household. Some ceremonies are to ward off danger and evil spirits [15]. Regrettably, many Hindu wedding rites have been adopted by Muslims of the Indian sub-continent, consider them as their own and have given them a new lease of life under the banner of Islam. It is critical for us not to accept these wedding rites, as they are innovations and have no place in the Shari'ah. Failure to recognise this can lead us on a path to the fire of hell, may Allah forgive us.

## MISCELLANEOUS EVENTS

It is shameful, but we seem to be grabbing at everything that is going in the market of customs without thought or consideration. As far as our Shari'ah is concerned, we seem to be slaughtering it easier and quicker than taking a lamb to the altar. Events which have crept into our weddings and hold great importance include: using of flowers, carnations, photography, the closing of the house door to the couple, the Mendhi party, hiding the shoes of the bride, setting of a stage, free mixing of sexes, welcoming speeches, stag nights and honeymoons, etc.

Most of these rites have either been derived from other religions or are consequences of the commercial pressure exercised upon us via the media and advertising. The media is influencing us in every aspect of life. The fashions and rites in our weddings are no exceptions. One only needs to look at the bride and the groom to realise how much

effort, expense and hardship they have gone through to look 'just like the picture' of a couple as depicted on TV or in an advert.

Insha'Allah, this study with detailed references will be sufficient evidence for readers to put beyond any doubt the origins of the rites which have been incorporated in our weddings. The engagement party, court marriage party, engagement and wedding rings, wearing of the crown and the wedding cake are the most important rites in a Christian wedding. The Jann party, Mo'harue and blessing of the bride form the pillars of a Hindu wedding. The stag night, honeymoon, white wedding dress and photography are just few of the events we have collected from commercial pressures via the media.

A question may be raised, "What is wrong in copying other people's customs and rites if it brings pleasure to us? Or if the copying is done without any religious significance?"

For these people the following limited quotes selected from the Holy Qur'an and ahadith should be the basis to present the Islamic viewpoint.

It is paramount for a Muslim to remain steadfast on the path of Islãm. Every facet of his life must be in accordance with the teachings of the Shari'ah. All his dealings, rites, attitudes and habits must conform to Islamic teachings. One must constantly compare and contrast one's practices with those ordained by the Glorious Qur'an and the Sunnah and follow what is right and reject what is outside the bounds of Islam. Many have adopted new and alternative ways, others have adhered to the traditions of their forefathers and not fully accepted the teachings of Islãm. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an:

***Verily, this is My Way, Leading straight: follow it: Follow not (other) paths: They will scatter you about From His great Path: Thus doth He command you, That ye may be righteous.***

*Al An'am 153*

In order to gain Allah's ﷻ pleasure we need to follow His teachings which are brought to us by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Unfortunately, many of us follow other than the teachings of Islãm and yet continue to claim the great heritage of Islãm.

*Say: 'If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you And forgive you your sins, for Allah is Oft -forgiving, Most Merciful.* *Al Imran 31*

People who invent new rites, which are not based on the Shari'ah and make them compulsory upon themselves are wrong and stand to be rejected. Every Muslim is bound by the Sunnah of the Noble Prophet ﷺ. The one who opposes or disagrees with the Sunnah of the Apostle ﷺ has gone astray. If it is proved beyond doubt that the rites practised are invented after the time of the Apostle ﷺ and are outside the Shari'ah, then the hadith below needs to be reflected upon :

*On the authority of A'ishah ﵂, the Messenger Muhammed ﷺ is reported to have said, "One who invents a new thing in this affair of ours, which is not from it, is rejected."* *Bukhari & Muslim*

The scholars have stated that the 'new things' in this include rites which are celebrated in marriage, such as the engagement party, the exchange of rings, the wearing of the tiara, fireworks, the stag and hen nights and other such activities, all such rites are wrong and stand rejected.

*Jabir ﵁ reports to the effect that the Messenger Muhammed ﷺ said, "The best speech is the speech of Allah; the best way is the way of the Messenger of Allah: the worst affair is the affair which is innovated and every innovated matter (attached to religion) is a going astray."* *Muslim*

In a further hadith, people are warned against establishing non-Islamic methods by practising the rites of the pagans:

*It is stated on the authority of Ibn Abbas* ؓ *to the effect that the Apostle* ﷺ *said, "Three men incur the wrath of Allah: one who commits wrong action inside al-Haram (of Makkah and Madinah); another who adopts the rites and practices of the pagans and the third one who sheds the blood of a Muslim only for the sake of blood."* *Bukhari*

It is clear that to show friendship and love for the Prophet ﷺ is to follow his way. And one who follows the Sunnah is a person of the Paradise.

*It is stated on the authority of Anas* ؓ *that the Prophet* ﷺ *said to the effect, "O child! Pass your days and nights in a way that you do not hold on to malice and enmity" and added, "My child, it is my Sunnah and one who befriends my Sunnah, befriends me and one who keeps my friendship will accompany me to the Paradise."* *Tirmidhi*

It is a blessing and one of countless mercies of Allah ﷾ that he has made the deen simple and easy for us. However we have imposed difficulties upon ourselves by incorporating rites and duties that have no basis in the Shari'ah. Most people follow rites simply because their ancestors, friends or people of the community do so. Such an individual abandons the path of truth shown by Allah the Almighty and by His beloved Messenger ﷺ.

*Anas* ؓ *reports that the Prophet* ﷺ *said, "Do not put any hardship on yourselves, otherwise Allah will put hardship on you. Any nation which followed the path of hardship was put to hardship by Allah."* *Abu Dawud*

If we look at our activities closely and in particular at weddings, we will find that we have succumbed to our personal desires. Every rite is conducted to please the wife/husband, children, parents, community, friends and, above all, Shaytan. It is Allah the Creator and Sustainer we fail to please. It is very unfortunate for us that our activities are geared towards displeasing Allah ﷾.

*It is reported by Anas* ؓ *that the Messenger* ﷺ *said, "I have left two*

*things for you so that you will never go astray as long as you keep holding on to these two: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger."* *Al-Muwatta Imam Malik*

We have become so absorbed in the rituals of the non-Muslims that we consider them as our own and reject all those who are trying to guide us on the right path. Others have become extremely arrogant and so shameless in their activities that they take no heed or counsel. Allah says about them in Qur'an:

***When it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed'. They say: 'Nay! we shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?***

*Al Baqarah 170*

Some individuals consider participating in non-Islamic rituals trivial and others raise disputes regarding the commands of Allah, but they hold on to the rope of Shaytan who will lead them astray if they do not act quickly and change their ways. Allah says in Qur'an:

***And yet among men there are such as dispute about Allah without knowledge and follow every evil one obstinate in rebellion! About him (the Evil one) it is decreed that whoever turns to him for friendship, him will he lead astray. And he will guide him to the penalty of the Fire.***

*Al Hajj 3,4*

Allah ﷾ reminds us that those who raise questions regarding the commands of Allah ﷾ but follow their whims are misguided by Shaytan. To follow such whims (of the pagans, our forefathers or others), forsaking the Shari'ah, is the practice of the followers of Shaytan.

Those who have adopted non-Islamic rites in marriage, indulge in extravagant expenses up to the point where financial loans are necessary. Thousands of pounds are spent without thought or

consideration. A wedding dress alone can cost over five hundred pounds and the same amount for a cake and if one were to add the expense for rings, parties, hire of a hall, photographic expenses, the honeymoon, meals and decoration of the home these can easily add up to several thousand pounds. For many people these are the savings of a lifetime. Unfortunately, many families have to take out a loan and succumb to paying interest, which everyone knows is a detestable matter. Others who already are in debt incur further debts to hold a wedding rather than pay the original debt. This great burden of a wedding event which we put upon ourselves is a self-imposed hardship and is also depriving us of the mercy of Allah سبحانه وتعالى and leading us on the path to Jahannam. Extravagance is against the Shari'ah and brings the wrath of Allah سبحانه وتعالى as Allah سبحانه وتعالى says:

***…But squander not your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift; Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the shaytans: and the shaytan is ungrateful to his Lord."***

*Al Isra 26,27*

Allah gives wealth to be spent according to His commands and prohibitions. Those who consider themselves to be the masters of their wealth will be required to account for spending of their money with which Allah has favoured them. Extravagance is a sign of ungratefulness and a rejection of Allah's command:

***…But waste not by excess: for Allah does not love wasters.***

*Al An'am 141*

Spending money without consideration is deeply disapproved of and, in many cases, forbidden. A marriage which is celebrated without due consideration of excess expenditure is deprived of Allah's blessing. What a way for a couple to begin their life together!

*A report on the authority of A'ishah رضي الله عنها states, to the effect that, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Most blessing is in the matrimony which is simple and free from trouble."* *Baihaqi*

To invite friends and relatives to a Walimah (once) for the celebration of a marriage is the Sunnah, but to invite people for three or four days is an extravagance against the Sunnah. And the Messenger ﷺ advises us:

*On the authority of Abu Hurairah ؓ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have said, "Those who serve food as a return and for name and fame should not be acceptable to the invitees."* *Ahmad*

One question still remains unanswered, there are individuals who say, "We do not place any importance on these rites nor do we think they are significant. We only carry them out to please either the wife/husband, father/mother, or children." If this argument is to hold, then the wise and intelligent members of the family must educate the rest on the violation of the Shari'ah. No doubt if these rites are not held in high esteem then they will all agree to stop them. If they all agree without argument then al-hamdu-lillah and I earnestly stand corrected. However, more often than not family members will raise an outcry against any such suggestion. This rebellion is an indication of the importance placed on the rites that have engulfed us. Unfortunately, to many, omission of any of the above rites simply would not be a wedding.

To most people, warnings against mimicking other cultures will be nothing new. Ulamas, time and again have been trying to educate us on this issue. Why is it then, against all advice and our own beliefs, we continue to break the rules and regulations of Islãm, to our own detriment? There are at least six reasons why, in the face of all knowledge, we reject advice and warnings.

1. The ability to hold a grand wedding with the consequences of excessive expenditure has become a status symbol in our society. A wedding has thus become an occasion to exhibit our wealth to the community; hence the exhibition of presents and material goods. The desire to show-off one's wealth is so great that people even take loans

desire to show-off one's wealth is so great that people even take loans in order to impress others, only secretly realising the great cost being incurred. On the contrary, people holding simple weddings are labelled either poor or miserly.

2. It is an occasion where the family concerned can impress upon the larger community the number of people they know and, more importantly, WHO they know. That is why great effort is made to invite the rich. Within this the family has an opportunity to show off the close knit family unit (unfortunately most of the time this fails horribly).

3. It as an occasion wherein family members can take centre stage and, for a few days or a week, feel important. The bride may take the physical stage on the wedding day but the family's centre stage in society on that day should not be underestimated. This is an occasion where everyone's attention and flattery is directed to prominent family members and this acts as an opiate for staging a grand event.

4. The whole event acts as reinforcement of their status in society. As we have become engrossed in Western cultures, our values of importance, success and failure are also measured on Western scales. Thus a 'successful wedding' where there is excess of people, food, photography, gifts, music, dancing and exhibitionism becomes a means to prove to oneself and others the standing one has in society.

5. External pressure is applied on the family to stage an un-Islamic wedding by two groups of people. The first group are those who in the past have themselves held such a wedding and would like others to continue such traditions, so that they do not stand out as the wrong group. The second group who exert social pressure are those who in the future would like to hold a wedding that is against the Shari'ah, thereby making it easier for them in the future. Both these groups have personal vested interests.

6. By violating Allah's ﷻ commands in a group the guilt is reduced because Shaytan allows us to argue that if everybody is doing it, it cannot be bad. Hence most of us will be prepared to violate the Shari'ah at a wedding collectively rather than individually.

To summarise, in our present day wedding we are confronting Allah's ﷻ commands and therefore Allah ﷻ on at least three counts:

(a) Our weddings are against the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and we have read above the grave consequences of this (Refer to the Qur'anic ayah: *Al An'am 135; Al Imran 31; Al Baqarah 170; Al Hajj 3*).

(b) A major part of our wedding is littered with rites alien to Islãm, which may be considered innovations. As stated in the ahadith above the grave and miserable status of an innovator in the life hereafter is too distressful to contemplate. (Refer to the ahadith above from Bukhari, Muslim & Abu Dawud, Ahmad, Malik, at-Tirmidhi, al-Baihaqi, et al)

(c) Without doubt, most of our weddings incur extravagant expenses and, again, the Qur'an informs us that one who spends without due care is the brother of Shaytan. (Refer to the Qur'anic ayah: *Al Israa 26,27)*.

These violations of the Shari'ah, my brothers and sisters are no small matter. Irrespective of all our other good deeds that we may have, the violating of the Shari'ah in our weddings can lead us to the fire. May Allah ﷻ protect us and forgive us.
May Allah ﷻ give us, the community and the whole Ummah the tawfiq to adhere to the beautiful and elegant teachings of Islam-Ameen.

A final warning from the words of our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

*Abdullah ibn Umar* ؓ *narrated to the effect that the Apostle of Allah* ﷻ

*said, "He who chooses for himself/herself the mode of a people (customs & rites) will be regarded as one of them."* *Abu Dawud*

# THE WEDDINGS OF THE FIRST COMMUNITY

As Muslims we must follow the path shown to us by the beloved Prophet of Allah ﷺ and we have many weddings documented from the time of the Prophet ﷺ to follow and upon which to base our wedding practices. The marriage of Fatima ؓ to Ali ؓ is arguably one of the best examples to follow and of course there are the weddings of the Prophet ﷺ himself, which are well recorded and an inspiration and a standard for us to follow.

The following selected ahadith should assist us in preparing for weddings in our family.

One of the wealthy traders of the Muslims from Makkah had been Abdarrahman ibn Awf ؓ. However, after migration to Madinah he had become relatively poor for a time. When the Prophet ﷺ made brotherhood between the emigrants from Makkah with the individuals from Medinah, Abdarrahman ibn Awf's new brother Sa'd ibn ar-Rabee' al Ansari was a prosperous man with two wives. He offered to divorce one of his two wives so that Abdarrahman could marry her after her 'iddah period was over and to share his wealth equally with him. However, Abdarrahman said, 'May Allah bless you in your family and in your wealth. Show me where the market is.' So he gently refused his brother's kind offer. Soon he was trading and became prosperous again.

*… Abdarrahman ibn Auf ؓ came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he had traces of yellow on him (perfume stain used in weddings). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked him about it. He told him that he had just been married. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "How much (of a Mahr) did you hand over to her?" He said, "The weight of a date stone in gold." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Hold a Walimah, even if it is only with a*

*sheep."* *Bukhari & Muslim*

Abdarrahman was relatively wealthy and so the Messenger ﷺ told him to hold a Walimah, even if it only be with a sheep.

In a similar incidence, when Jabir ibn Abdullah ؓ came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with a yellow perfume stain, he enquired, 'Have you married?' He replied, 'yes.'

Both these incidents show that even though the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was in their midst, the Sahabas married without informing or inviting him. The Prophet ﷺ showed no animosity towards them thus condoning their actions and promoting to perform nikah as soon as the bride and groom agreed. Further the Prophet ﷺ only requested Abdarrahman to hold a Walimah because he could afford it.

And in an account of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to Safiyyah ؓ:

*Bukhari narrated from Anas ؓ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ freed Safiyyah (a captive enslaved at the Battle of Khaibar) and then he married her and he made her freedom from slavery her Mahr and he gave a Walimah with hais (dates mixed with clarified butter and a preparation of dried curd. Sometimes meal of parched barley or wheat is put into it and sometimes dried breadcrumbs are used instead of the dried curd).* *Bukhari*

And in another statement:

*Anas ؓ said, "The Prophet ﷺ never gave a Walimah for any of his wives as he did for Zaynab. He gave a Walimah with a sheep."* *Bukhari*

The above ahadith illustrate that the extravagance shown at modern weddings within our community is far from the spirit of the first community and emphasises how remote we are from the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

To see something of the beautiful and loving spirit of the Prophet ﷺ and the people of Madinah, let us look at the following hadith relating to the celebration of the Walimah:

*Anas ibn Malik* ﵁ *said, "The Prophet* ﷺ *saw some women and children returning from a wedding and he stood up swiftly for them and stood a long time, overjoyed at them and said, 'O Allah! You are some of the most beloved people to me'."* Bukhari

The wedding is an occasion of real rejoicing and joy for the couple themselves and for the whole community. The extravagance and the violation of the Islamic code of conduct which we have spoken so much against reverses that and makes the wedding nervous and stressful for all concerned. It is stressful financially because of the terrible competitiveness between the hosts and guests as mentioned above. It is important to realise that the Shari'ah is always revealed with a purpose and not merely as arbitrary divine or prophetic rules. The Shari'ah preserves life and health, property, family and lineage, consciousness, intellect and honour. Within the Shari'ah it is possible for people to have genuine joy and fulfilment, the pleasure of which are unknown to the modern citizen from the Peoples of the Book, or for our new pagans. The folly of abandoning the Shari'ah, which is a path to joy, for the ways of the disbelievers which so evidently lead to misery, ill-health, bankruptcy, being forgotten and despised in old age and a desperate death, is a greater stupidity than that of the disbelievers themselves. The disbelievers at least have the excuse that they have never really known Islãm. It is better that we grasp for ourselves the honour we have in being Muslims and take hold of that with reverence and gravity and invite the miserably unhappy people to join us in the sane and noble way of Islãm, rather than we trade our Islãm in for their disastrous way of life, for that would be betraying ourselves and them.

Let us assist each other and take heed of the great counsel from the

ayah of Qur'an and the Sunnah so that in the life hereafter we join and stand with the people of the Ummah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and nobody else. Ameen.

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# APPENDIX

1 Though Mahr is Wajib it is not a pre-requisite for the validity of Nikah.

2 Mufti Taqi Usmani, Discourses on Islamic way of life, Vol 1 Pg 217 Darul Ishat, Pakistan. 1999.

3According to Imam Abu Hanifa [ra] a physically mature woman's can decide independently for a Nikah and the guardian's consent is not a condition.

4 Nouvelle Revue de Droit Francis VI, pps. 381-383

5 Baker, Margret, Wedding Customs and Folklore, p. 76.

6 References for this section. Duschesne, Christian Worship (3rd edition, London, 1910). A History of Matrimonial Institutions, I (Chicago, 1904). Watkins, Holy Matrimony (London, 1895). Bingham, Christian Marriage (New York,1900). The York Manual, publ. by Surtees Society (Durham 1875).

7 Thumston, Herbert, The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Cotenian Edition, Pg 707..

8 Trevor-Roper, H. The Invention of Tradition: the Highland in Scotland, Cambridge Univ. Press.

9 Charsley, Simon R., Wedding Cakes and Cultural History, Routledge.

10 Fieldhouse 1986

11 Charsley, Simon R., op. cit., Pps.11-140.

12 Baker, Magaret, op.cit, Pg 81.

13 Burghait, Richard, Hindus in Great Britain, pps. 184-189.

14 Pandey, Raj Bali , Hindu Samskaras, p. 211

15 Dubois, Abbe J. A., Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies, pps. 214-241.